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....and granted Ghanaian News with an Exclusive Interview

Anas Aremeyaw Anas was in Toronto with Ryan Mullins and granted Ghanaian News Canada this Interview." Chameleon" a documentary about Anas life and work by Ryan Mullins, was premiered in Toronto on April 25th 2015

Anas Aremeyaw Anas a Ghanaian investigative journalist born in the late 1970s.[1] Anas is famous for utilizing his anonymity as a tool in his investigation arsenal (very few people have seen his face).[2] A multimedia journalist who specializes in print media and documentary, Anas focuses on issues of human rights and anti-corruption in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa.

Anas has won critical acclaim for his work advocating for the right to not be held in human slavery or servitude and to have a standard of living in the event of an illness. His investigative works have won him worldwide acclaim with President Barack Obama highlighting his virtues in a speech during his 2009 visit to Ghana: "An independent press. A vibrant private sector. A civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy. We see that spirit in courageous journalists like Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who risked his life to report the truth."[3] Anas has won over fourteen international awards for his investigative work. He was polled as the 5th most influential Ghanaian in 2011 by ETV.[4] and named one of the "Most Influential Africans of the Year" by the New African Magazine.[5] in December 2014. "Chameleon" a documentary about Anas' life and work by Ryan Mullins was premiered at the 2014 IDFA festival in Amsterdam.

Ryan Mullins is a Montreal-based Canadian film director, cinematographer and editor. He is part of the Montreal-based Canadian film production company, EyeSteelFilm. His directing credits include the documentary short Volta, and the feature documentary The Frog Princes. The film won a Golden Sheaf at the 2012 Yorkton Film Festival, and was also awarded the NFB Kathleen Shannon Award for a documentary film that "allows people outside the dominant culture to speak for themselves".[1]

Ryan made his first short documentary, Volta in 2009.[2] The film looks at an aging cinema in rural Ghana and the people it affected in this small town.

Volta made its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival

Anas Aremeyaw Anas was in Toronto with Ryan Mullins and granted Ghanaian News with the following Exclusive Interview.

GN: Anas welcome to Toronto

ANAS: You are welcome

GN: This is not your first time in Toronto. I remember in some years back you were in Toronto to receive an award. Is that not right?

ANAS: Yeah! That is true.

GN: So what brought you again to Toronto.

ANAS: You might probably have heard of a film coming out is being premiered here and it is the North American premiere. Earlier it was premiered at the World Documentary Festival in Amsterdam, and from there to Mexico and now it is here to be premiered. From here it is going to London, and then Ethiopia and Ghana next. So I am here to attend the premiere and answer some questions regarding the film.

GN: Ok so where in Toronto will the film be premiered?

RM: It is going to be at the Royal Cinema on Saturday April 25 night at 5.30pm and Scotia Bank Theatre at 4.30pm. It will also be available on iTunes Video on Demand for the week throughout the festival. You have to search Hot Docs on iTunes by logging on iTunes and it is one of the films being made available so that anyone in Canada could watch it.

GN: With the film has it been premiered yet?

RM: No

ANAS: It is doing a world tour and will eventually land in Ghana.

GN: From my understanding you have been called mostly celebrated journalist in Africa, James Bond of investigative journalism. So how did that come about.

RM: I have read about Anas, in this great article in the Atlanta magazine called Smuggler, Forger, Writer, Spy that told a story about a larger than life journalist and I have spent some time working and living in Ghana 2008-2009. A mutual friend whilst I was there put us in touch which kind of broke the ice between the two of us. She was the one who initially brought the article to my attention and I knew that had to be my next film. I was always looking for a reason to go back to Ghana and make another film.

GN: So you were in Ghana to make another film?

RM: Yes, I made my first short film in the Volta Region. It was about an old cinema that fallen apart and had been converted into a missionary school for about 300 children. I came back to Montreal and worked here. Like I said, I have always looked for a reason to go back and make another film in Ghana and Anas was the next one.

GN: So I can say you have been travelling with him most of the time. is that correct?

RM: No, I would travel to Ghana for about a month or a month and half at a time over the past 2 1/2 years probably five or six times. I travelled back and forth so I would spend about a month with Anas embedded with his team and kind of just exposed to whatever was going on at a time. You know sometimes he would have several different stories that would be going on at once so we would follow those stories to see how they end up?

GN: Anas can you tell us a little bit about your family?

ANAS: Well, I have an extended family?

GN: I understand you went to University of Ghana, Legon, right?

ANAS: Yes, I am a product of University of Ghana.

GN: After your completion you rejected a job at the Ghanaian Times and instead went to Crusading Guide. So what made you go to a small company instead of a big state run media house.

ANAS: Well I guess at the time my thinking was we wanted a more militant kind of journalism that befitted the true nature of the system and I found out more in the private newspaper than in the government paper at that time I saw the government newspaper to be a weaker brand as compared to the government papers and if you don't mind my editor in chief the formidable and energetic Kwaku Baako jr. always a militant. And it was nice learning under his feet, and also learning under the feet of Cabral Blay Amihere. Those are the tenets that has brought me far.

GN: I know you have done a lot of investigations into some of the problems, some of the corruption and some other things going on in Ghana and other parts of the continent and I see you have been successful in filming some of these results. So where does these results go, because some of them I don't see the government or the authorities do something about it. So how does it end up with all your efforts, risking your life and doing this and then doesn't look to me that the results that comes out are implemented or goes somewhere or makes a change. Can you tell me a little bit about how you see it?

ANAS: It is very true that some of the journalism that we do and that is not limited to me alone. That does make an impact but also to say categorically that all does not make any impact cannot be true. Now let me take you back to the Interest of the State cocoa smuggling story that I did at the borders that we had a lot of custom officers. I recall the Late President Mills then informed me to make that investigation and I did that.

GN: So he personally asked you to do it?

ANAS: Yes, I collaborated with the state in doing that investigation what happened eventually was that the people who were involved were arrested. I went to court, I testified and as we speak the people are in jail. Now I refer you to another story that I did at the Registrar Generals where a particular man who seem to have committed some crimes. This man also as we speak now is in jail was jailed 5 years. Now let me refer you back to Nana Kwasi Agyeman, one of the highlights you see in the film is in jail for 15 years. I then did the human trafficking story Chinese Sex Mafia. The people are in jail for 42 years. I did another story on Ricardo on drugs and as I speak Ricardo is in for 18 and if this is not result what else is result. but we do not have to measure only by sentence. You see when you can impact the life of a human even if it is one limb then you have made an impact- Mentukwa is a perfect example where all the children were liberated. They had new lives. Not just that there are many human trafficking stories that have been done. The undercover in the Psychiatric Hospital and the changes that have been made within

and call this progressive and we have to welcome it not to keep that blanket thing the government does not do anything. If the government is not alive the people are not dead the people are still there so whether the government moves or does not move, we have to make it a consistent need or a double necessity to keep on pushing the frontiers of democracy to make sure the right things are done in the society.

ANAS: Another question, maybe I am just jumping the gun. I want to ask before I forget. I understand you work with authorities and law enforcement agencies. How can you guarantee that some of these law enforcement may be corrupted and undermine your ability to do your work. Can all of them be trusted. They can compromise the things that you do.

ANAS: First of all, the general rule is that I don't trust you, don't trust me, I don't trust my mum and my dad, and they don't have to trust me. That is the general rule if you want to stay alive, but in spite of all this the big question is does your association with the state or security agencies stop you from playing watchdog over all? I say no. In my entire journalism career, I have consistently criticized the Ghana Police, Customs and all other security agencies but the truth is that I don't have powers of arrest. It is sad and very irritating to do journalism that at the end of the day strengthen the bad guys and give them more power to walk blatantly in the streets of Accra. My journalism is hinged on three principles, naming, shaming and jailing, and I take the jailing part very seriously. I am a trained lawyer by profession called by the Ghana Bar Association and I make sure that I get to stand in the docket and testify against these bad guys so that at the end of the day they go to where they truly belong so if collaborating with state agencies is what is going to aid me to do that I welcome it every day and I will do it every day.

RM: I just want to ask you to give specific examples where you have criticized law enforcement agencies or the government.

ANAS: The cocoa smuggling story that we were talking about. Customs and Police Officers who were heavily criticized. I have done investigations when you look at the Dons of the Forest Immigration Officers were deeply involved. I cannot see any story even in the prisons that I don't criticize them- Undercover in the Prisons. Most of my stories focus always on government action or inaction.

GN: You have been criticizing heavily these government security agencies. We are journalists also and our fears is that one of them might compromise your security. Like they will leak information about an impending operation. They might be influenced by the bad guys you are going after to unmask you and put your life at risk.

ANAS: The risk of getting unmasked is a life one, it will always be there whether there is a police officer, Custom Officer or even people within team can unmask me. Most important thing is to ask when that does happen, is there any protective shield and I am saying that when we talk security we put all these into consideration and we make sure if it should happen, we have the capacity to deal with it. There are many small things that happen around me which I cannot discuss publicly and I can assure you that we our optimum best to make sure that our security is well protected.

GN: From what I know, only few people have seen your face. So when you travel, how do you go about say in a public transportation like in an airplane. is it that they don't recognize you or you still cover your face or travel in a private jet.

ANAS: Obviously I don't travel in a private jet. There a little things that I do that enhances my anonymity and I know if there is no need to wear a disguise I don't wear it. If it is necessary I will wear it to make sure that nobody knows it is me. The good news is that it has worked and it still works. i must emphasize that I maintain this and it is not only specific with Ghana, I have been doing this whilst working with BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera so it is not that it is a selective piece for Ghana. It is all over the world wherever I take my job I make sure that I implement safety.

GN: In all your operations, can you say that there have been one or two that it didn't work or that you have failed or worked to your satisfaction?

ANAS: Sure, there are many of them that has not been to my satisfaction. And I don't do my work thinking that everything that comes out must be to my satisfaction. We have to keep pushing the frontiers of democracy and you cannot expect every government to be working up to your satisfaction. A key example is the Children's Home of Hell which is when I went undercover to Osu Children's Home. I would say nothing happened and recently did a story called Care less, a lot of paparazzi was on it, a lot of government talk, but it has been empty, I still don't have to go to bed, I still have to push the frontiers so there are a couple others where things don't work and that is not synonymous to me. But the point is when this happen we have to develop the courage to do a lot more follow up and to push and keep civil society informed so that they ask the necessary questions. Don't forget that at the end of the day of the day, our politicians will be brought to book when it comes to voting everybody looks at issues around and ask did their politician act on this work well and if he/she did we will vote him/her out.

GN: I know you have gained a lot of international recognition. Even when President Obama came to Ghana, I was in Ghana, he mentioned your name in his speech. How are you funded for all these projects that you do? By outside sources?

ANAS: I work for so many people. like I said before I work for BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera and CBN. All those guys when they come over we work together. Moreover, I do my own work. Also I sometimes collaborate with government and then if the government needs to pay they will pay and make sure I do the investigation and I am not ashamed of that at all. The most important thing is that it must bring change to the society.

GN: So like what you said earlier based on your investigation, I can see that a lot of them have worked, some have been implemented, some in jail, but still I remember the Tema Harbour project, it looks like still the problems are coming back.

ANAS: You have got to ask yourself, when we say impact, for me the fact that I chronicled the activities of Tema Harbour that today you can sit in your house and relate your experiences is an achievement. Again a lot within the very first month of having done that story, government retrieved \$200 million into its kitty. Again a lot of changes, a lot expansion work has been done. We have to consistently keep fighting so if one government came and did the cleaning and another government came and slept corruption will come back because we live in a third world country where people are always devising new ways of survival so if you don't consistently fight corruption, it will always be endemic in our fabric. I wouldn't say that things are very bad in the harbour. There has been some improvement but perhaps not up to the standard that we want.

GN: You have received so many awards. Which one of them is so dear to you or cherishes it most.

ANAS: To be honest it will be very difficult to answer this question because the work that is done is not motivated by awards. It is about putting a smile on that young child's face so it is very difficult for me to single out an award. It is good to have awards, to be recognized. I am not one that will naturally sit down and poke through the awards and say this one was the best. I have never done that before. All I know is that the awards we receive must not induce in us a sense of complacency. Our duty is to society and at all cost we must not be blinded by accolades. We must focus because there are lots of work to be done back home. Here institutions are doing well but you would agree if you have recently been to Ghana that you would realize that some of our institutions are basically not functioning and so we have a lot more to do.

GN: So how long are you going to be in Toronto

ANAS: I will be leaving for US -Los Angeles on Tuesday April 28.

GN: Do you have any last word or something to say to our readers?

ANAS: Perhaps my very senior colleagues here and friends, I always say that building a nation takes the effort of everyone. It does not matter where you are. Even when you raise your voice on an issue, it is important to the country. The work that you people are doing is well appreciated. There is only one Ghana that we have, you cannot turn another country into Ghana. Sometimes we all become disappointed, disenchanted whether we like it or not that is our roots.

GN: Thank you for granting us this interview.

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